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UNCLAS LJUBLJANA 001092

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SUBJECT: SLOVENE BIOMETRIC PASSPORT UPDATE

REFTEL: LJUBLJANA 00877

1. (U) SUMMARY: Slovenia will begin issuing a first-phase biometric passport containing photo recognition data before October 26, 2005. A second-phase biometric passport incorporating both photo recognition and fingerprints will be introduced at a later date, in compliance with new EU requirements. With the introduction of the new biometric passport, Slovenia will also introduce new procedures for delivering passports to their owners. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Fresh back from meeting with officials of other EU member states, Slovene contacts said the EU decision on a uniform standard for biometric passports has been made and will be finalized by mid-January 2005. The EU standard will mandate two biometric identifiers: 1) facial recognition, with a deadline for implementation of 18 months from the adoption of the standard, and 2) fingerprints, with a deadline for implementation of 36 months from the date of adoption of the standard.

3. (U) With the EU standard finally set, the Slovene authorities see a clear road ahead. In a meeting December 3 with Conoff, State Undersecretaries Bojan Trnovsek of the Ministry of Interior, and Vlasta Valencic-Pelikan and Andrej Ster of the MFA's Consular Department, said they expect to have the new Slovene passport completed by June or July 2005 - within the timeframe they had predicted earlier (RefTel). They expect to begin issuing the new passport no later than October 26, 2005.

4. (SBU) Trnovsek said the new passport would feature a contact-less chip imbedded in the polycarbonate bio-data page. The chip would be loaded with facial recognition data, biographic data, a digitized image of the applicant's signature, and all necessary public infrastructure data. He said Slovenia would need to adopt a new law on passports consistent with data protection requirements. He expects the new legislation will be ready to submit to Parliament by late February or early March.

5. (U) By the October 26, 2005 deadline imposed by U.S. law for Visa Waiver Program travelers, Slovenia will have transitioned completely to issuing only the new biometric passports. There will be no option to apply for a non-biometric passport. Additionally, Slovenia will change the way passports are delivered to applicants. Slovene authorities will discontinue delivering passports to applicants by post. Instead, all applicants will be required to pick up their passports in person at the Administrative Unit in their area. At the time of pickup the authorized official will verify the accuracy of all information loaded on the chip with the Interior Ministry's centralized database, and compare the digitized photo image with the applicant in person. At this time, the applicant too will have the opportunity to read and verify the accuracy of information loaded on the chip.

6. (U) Trnovsek said Slovenia is in excellent shape to begin issuing biometric passports, noting that Slovenia's current photo standard (600 DPI), which exceeds the ICAO standard (300 DPI), is sufficient for facial recognition. The digitized signature currently used in Slovene passports is also suitable for loading in a chip, and Slovenia already has a centralized database for passport data.

7. (U) In discussing the challenges of incorporating both facial recognition and fingerprints in a contact-less chip, Trnovsek and Ster said that currently chips of sufficient capacity, quality, and reliability are not available in sufficient numbers and at reasonable prices. But they said such chips would undoubtedly be available soon. They also discussed the issue of validity. Slovene authorities have yet to decide whether their biometric passport will be valid for 10 years (as is the current passport), or for less. They said it is unclear whether chips will last for 10 years, or that chip manufacturers will guarantee the functioning of their products for 10 years.

8. (U) Ster said plans to conduct a pilot study to test the biometric passport in real world environments have been dropped (REFTEL). Instead, the passport will be tested under controlled conditions before its introduction.

ROBERTSON

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